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54 Electronic toothbrush.

57 A tooth-brush comprising a handle (3) and a brush portion (5). The handle contains a piezo-electric generating element (4) having two electrodes (7,8). A diode (9) is situated between electrodes (7,8) for rectifying the flow of negative electrons from the brush portion (5) via the user's body to the handle (3). The flow of electrons induces a reducing process which effectively removes dental plaque.

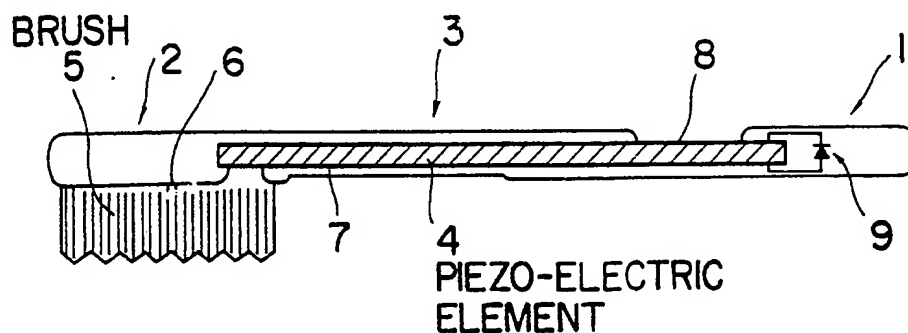


FIG. 1

EP 0 324 120 A1

ELECTRONIC TOOTHBRUSH

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to an electronic toothbrush for a purpose of removing dental plaque by means of brushing and discharging electrons.

A tooth decay is a disease that hard inorganic teeth are decayed by an acid produced by bacteria in a mouth. Dental plaque, that is composed of propagating bacteria, depositing protein and inorganic compound in saliva, overspreads and builds up on a tooth-surface. Tartar is produced by calcification of the plaque which main ingredient is calcium phosphate. Pyorrhea alveolaris is an inflammation of gums caused by plaque left on a root of tooth and under a gum line.

A conventional electronic toothbrush using a dry battery or solar battery generated electrons that decompose plaque and the neutralize lactic acid by means of a reducing process around teeth. This reducing process is caused of the electrons that flow through conductive saliva and water with positive and negative ions, for example, kalium, sodium, magnesium, bicarbonate, chlorine, phosphoric acid, etc. However, the conventional electronic toothbrush is generally high in price because of using a complicated waterproof structure and an expensive battery. Furthermore, there are other drawbacks that a life of a dry battery is limited and an output voltage of a solar battery is low.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is an object of the present invention, therefore, to simplify a structure of an electronic toothbrush, to reduce a cost without using a high price battery, to obtain a high output voltage and to get unlimited life. These objects of the present invention are realized by utilizing a piezo-electric element mounted in a handle of a toothbrush.

Electrodes are formed on both sides of said piezo-electric element located in the center portion of the handle, and then the electrode on one side is exposed in close vicinity to the brushing portion and the electrode on the other side is exposed on the gripped portion of the handle. On the occasion of toothbrushing, positive and negative charges are generated on both sides of the piezo-electric element as a result of bending and vibration of the handle.

It is necessary to select proper polarity of the piezo-electric element and put in a diode between both electrodes for generating selectively negative

charges on the electrode exposed in close vicinity to the brushing portion. Electrons flow from the electrode near the brushing portion to the electrode on the gripped portion of the handle, through saliva and water in a mouth, teeth, a root of tooth, a human body and a hand. Consequently, dental plaques are removed effectively by a reducing process due to the electrons around teeth.

According to one aspect of this invention, for achieving the objects described above, there is provided an electronic toothbrush comprising: a piezo-electric element with piezo-electric characteristic mounted in a handle between a gripped portion and a brushing portion of said electronic toothbrush; an exposed electrode in close vicinity to said brushing portion and an opposite exposed electrode on said gripped portion of said handle formed on both sides of said piezo-electric element, respectively.

The nature, principle and utility of the invention will become more apparent from the following detailed description when read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The present invention is described in greater detail with reference to the drawings, in which:

FIG.1 is a cross sectional view of a basic embodiment of the present invention;

FIG.2 is illustrative of a principle of a piezo-electric element used in the present invention;

FIGs.3 and 4 are characteristic curves observed in an oscilloscope of output voltages generated by piezo-electric elements without and with a diode, respectively;

FIGs.5 and 6 are perspective views illustrative of piezo-electric bimorphs;

FIGs.7 and 8 are cross sectional views illustrative of location of piezo-electric elements in handles;

FIG.9 is a cross sectional view illustrative of a reformed embodiment of the present invention; and

FIG.10 is a perspective view illustrative of another embodiment of the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

The basic embodiment of the present invention is shown in the cross sectional view of FIG.1. A piezo-electric element 4 with piezo-electric characteristic is operatively mounted in a handle 3 of a toothbrush between a gripped portion 1 and a brushing portion 2 of the handle 3. A diode 9 with rectifying action is used to electrically connect an electrode 7 and an electrode 8 formed on both sides of the piezo-electric element 4. The electrode 7 is exposed in close vicinity to the brushing portion 2 on the brush 5 side of the handle 3, and the electrode 8 is exposed on the opposite side. The brush 5 is laid on the surface 6 of the brushing portion 2.

FIG.2 illustrates the principle of generating the output voltage in the piezo-electric element 10. When the piezo-electric element 10 is expanded and contracted horizontally, positive and negative charges are generated on the electrodes 11 and 12, respectively. The piezo-electric element 10, for example a polyvinylidene fluoride film, consists of countless dipoles that allow the element to create electric charges resulting from expansion and contraction applied to the element. If both electrodes 11 and 12 are electrically connected, the electric current flows from the electrode with negative charges to the electrode with positive charges.

FIGs.3 and 4 illustrate the characteristic curves of the output voltage generated from the piezo-electric element, as shown in FIG.2, mounted on a piece of plastic plate as a cantilever at the time of tapping without and with the diode 9, respectively. The ordinate axis denotes the voltage V by 2 volt per one scale and the abscissas axis the time t by 20 msec per one scale, respectively. In the characteristic curve of FIG.3, without the diode 9, the output voltage is lower and the output voltage of opposite polarity is generated at the time of resilience of the plastic plate with the piezo-electric element. In FIG.4, with the diode 9, the output voltage is higher and nearly rectified without opposite polarity.

The present invention utilizes the phenomenon mentioned above. When the handle 3 of the toothbrush shown in FIG.1 is bent, the output voltage is generated according to expansion and contraction of the piezo-electric element 4. In other words, the output voltage results in between the brush 5 side electrode 7 exposed in close vicinity to the brushing portion 2 and the other electrode 8 exposed on the gripped portion 1 of the handle 3. The external force is always applied to the brush 5 when toothbrushing, and therefore the handle 3 of the toothbrush is bent almost always toward the surface 6 with the brush 5. The piezo-electric element 4 is polarized so that the negative charges are generated on the electrode 7 due to the expansion and the contraction corresponding to the bending of the

handle 3. Electrons flow in the circuit from the electrode 7 with negative charges to the electrode 8 with positive charges, through conductive saliva and water in a mouth, teeth or gums, a human body and a hand. Furthermore, to generate the electrons only out from the electrode 7 and to obtain a higher output voltage, the diode 9 rectifying action is electrically connected between the electrodes 7 and 8. On the occasion that positive and negative charges are generated on the electrodes 7 and 8, respectively, most of the electric current flows in the diode 9 with low resistivity due to the forward direction, not in the circuit of the mouth and the human body with relatively high resistivity. Then, the electric current from the electrode 7 to the electrode 8 is rectified as shown in FIG.4, the higher negative output voltages is generated only on the electrode 7. In general, the diode used in the present invention is low priced due to the small size and has water-resisting quality compared with a dry battery. Moreover, the piezo-electric element, a polyvinylidene fluoride film, for example, is low priced and water-resistant.

The other embodiments of the present invention are illustrated in FIGs.5-10.

The bending motion of the plastic handle 3 between the gripped portion 1 and the brushing portion 2 is mentioned above in FIG.1. The negative charges corresponding to the bending of the handle 3 must be generated on the electrode 7. As mentioned in the summary of the invention, it is necessary to obtain electrons near the brushing portion 2 for the purpose of effective removing plaque and tartar by brushing and a reducing process. The piezo-electric bimorph 13, the laminate of the piezo-electric elements as shown in FIG.5, generated different charges on the electrodes 14 and 15 in response to the bending.

Another piezo-electric bimorph in FIG.6, the laminate of a piezo-electric element 17 and a metal sheet 16, can be used in the present invention. In this case, different charges are generated on electrode 18 and the metal sheet 16 due to the bending. The piezo-electric element 17, a polyvinylidene fluoride film, is relatively flexible, but the metal sheet 16 is rigid and has not flexibility of expansion and contraction. On the occasion that the piezo-electric element 17 of the bimorph in FIG.6 is located on the brush side of the handle of the toothbrush, the piezo-electric element 17 is mainly expanded. In the contrary case, the piezo-electric element 17 is mostly contracted when toothbrushing. The piezo-electric elements of the bimorphs shown in FIGs.5 and 6 are necessary to be polarized so that the negative charges are generated on the electrodes near the brushing portion. Subsequently, the other embodiments shown in FIGs.7 and 8 which can achieve effectively the object of the

present invention use the single layer piezo-electric elements 4, not bimorphs. These single layer elements 4 that are mounted in the location shifted from the center line X-X of the handle 3 are consequently contracted and expanded as shown in FIGs.7 and 8, respectively, when bending of the handle 3. The polarizing directions of the piezo-electric elements 4 are perpendicular to the elements 4, and opposite directions, in FIGs.7 and 8, respectively. As noted above, the object of the present invention is achieved according to locating the piezo-electric elements 4 which are expanded and contracted due to the bending of the handle 3. It is a matter of course that the diodes 9 with rectifying action are electrically connected with both opposite electrodes to gain effectively the higher output voltage.

In the embodiment of the present invention, as shown in FIG.9, the only electrode 7 formed on one side of the piezo-electric element 4 is exposed in close vicinity to the surface 6 of the brushing portion, and the only electrode 8 is exposed on the gripped portion 1, respectively. Moreover, the part of the piezo-electric element 4 with electrodes on both sides is sealed hermetically in the plastic of the handle, hence the short circuit between electrodes 7 and 8 is not caused when toothbrushing.

The more practical embodiment of the present invention is illustrated in FIG.10. A metal plate 19 is connected directly and operatively with the electrode 8 exposed on the gripped portion 1 of the handle 3 and fastened around the gripped portion 1. Furthermore, the diode 9 mounted in the gripped portion 1 is electrically connected between the electrode 7 and the metal plate 19. When toothbrushing, a hand touches almost always the metal plate 19, and therefore the object of the present invention is effectively achieved.

It should be understood that many modifications and adaptations of the invention will become apparent to those skilled in the art and it is intended to encompass such obvious modifications and changes in the scope of the claims appended hereto.

Claims

1. An electronic toothbrush comprising: a piezo-electric element with piezo-electric characteristic mounted in a handle between a gripped portion and a brushing portion of said electronic toothbrush; an exposed electrode in close vicinity to said brushing portion and an opposite exposed electrode on said gripped portion of said handle formed on both sides of said piezo-electric element, respectively.

2. An electronic toothbrush as claimed in Claim 1 further includes a diode with rectifying action electrically connected with said electrodes formed on both sides of said piezo-electric element.

3. An electronic toothbrush as claimed in Claim 1 or 2 wherein said piezo-electric element is a thin and flexible piezo-electric material.

4. An electronic toothbrush as claimed in any of claims 1 to 3 wherein said piezo-electric element is a bimorph structure.

5. An electronic toothbrush as claimed in any claims 1 to 4 wherein thick-nesses in compartments of plastic for covering said piezo-electric element are different at an upper portion and a lower portion of said piezo-electric element.

6. An electronic toothbrush as claimed in any of claims 1 to 5 which has an electrode only on one side of said piezo-electric element at an exposed area in close vicinity to said brushing portion of said handle.

7. An electronic toothbrush as claimed in any of claims 1 to 6 which has a metal plate electrically connected with a top of said electrode and a diode, said diode being electrically connected with said another electrode formed on said piezo-electric element, said metal plate being fastened around said gripped portion of said handle.

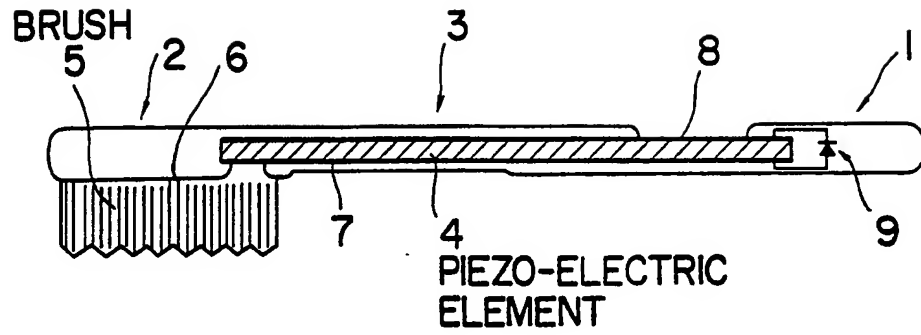


FIG. 1

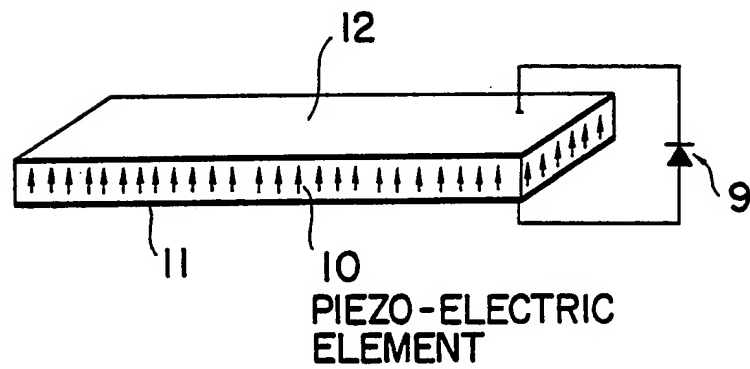


FIG. 2

BIMORPH
PIEZO-ELECTRIC
ELEMENT

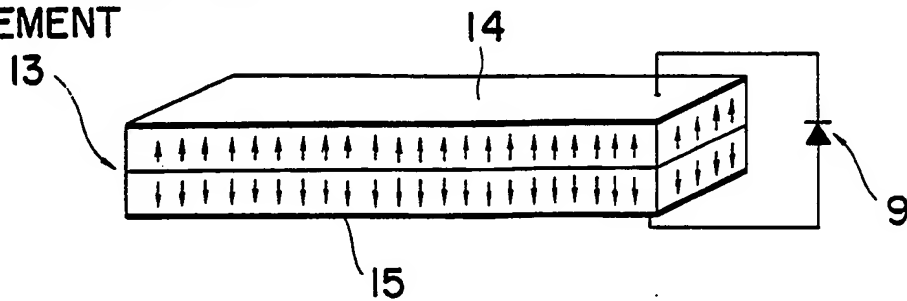


FIG. 5

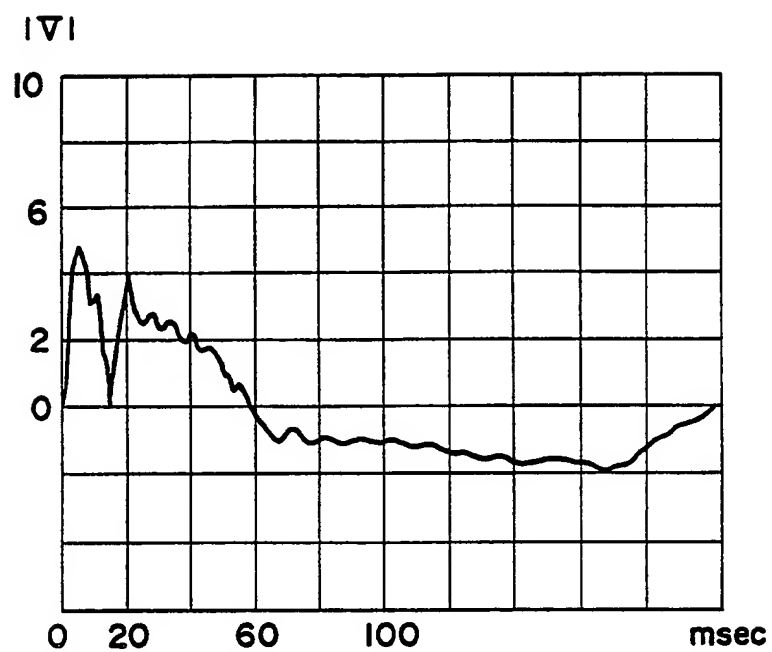


FIG. 3

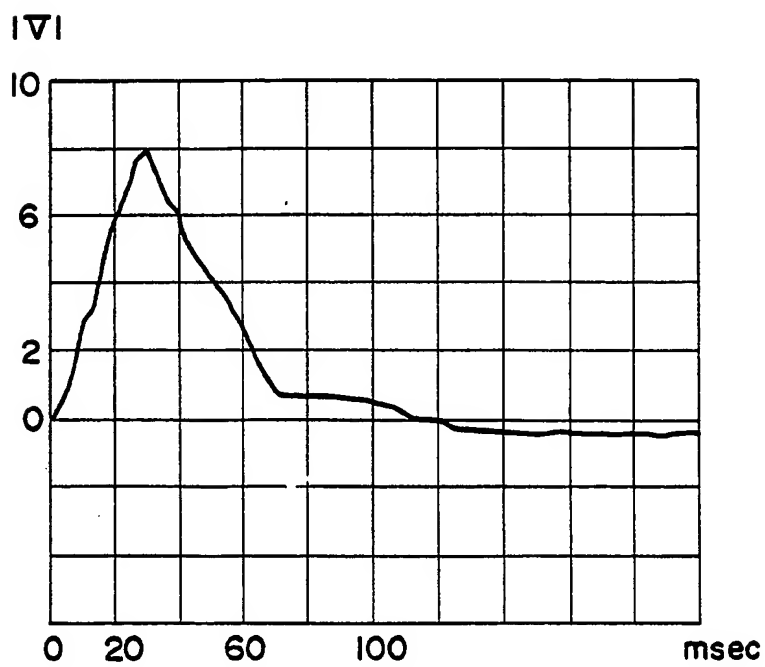


FIG. 4

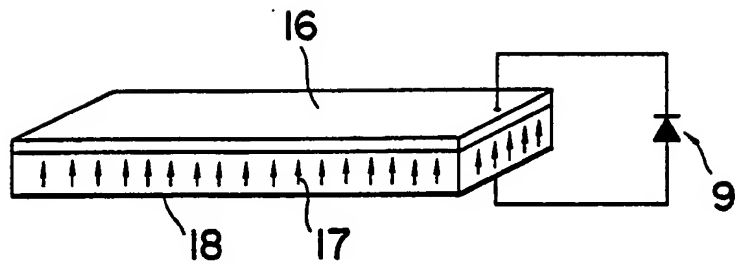


FIG. 6

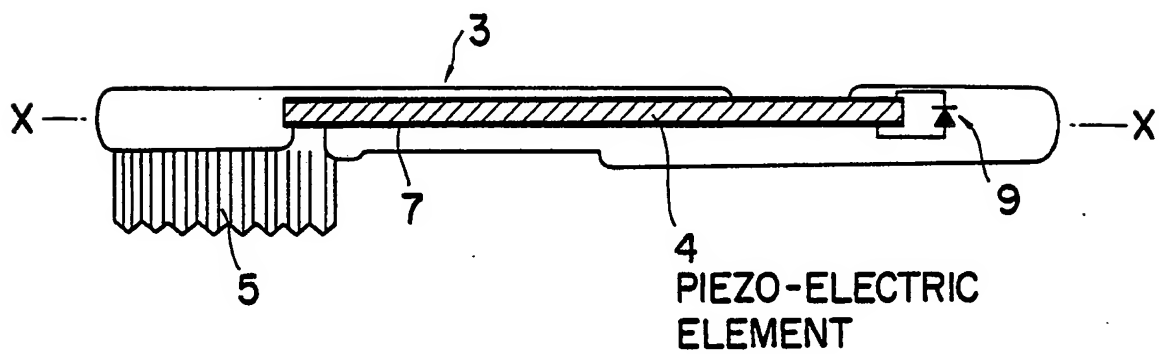


FIG. 7

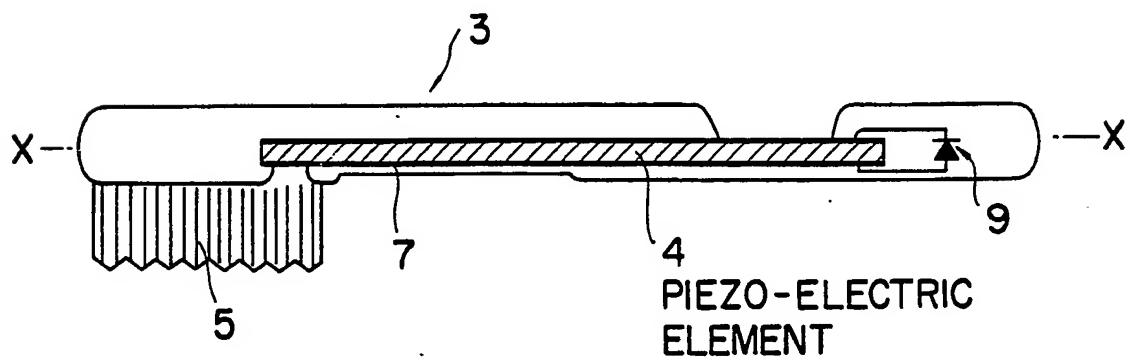


FIG. 8

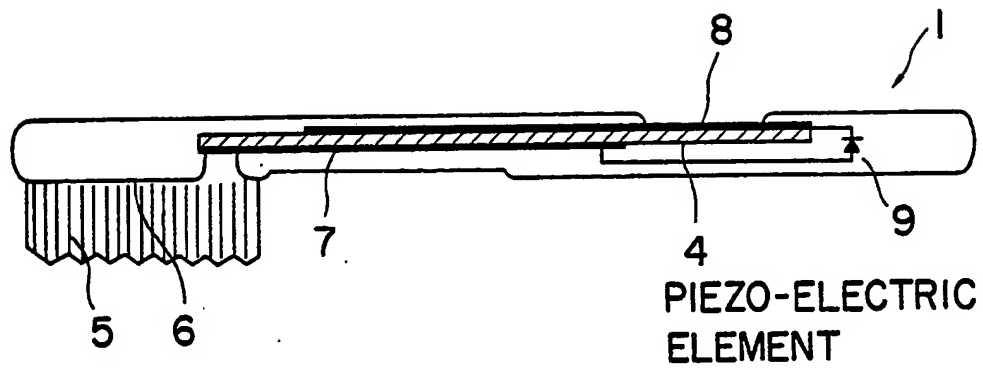


FIG. 9

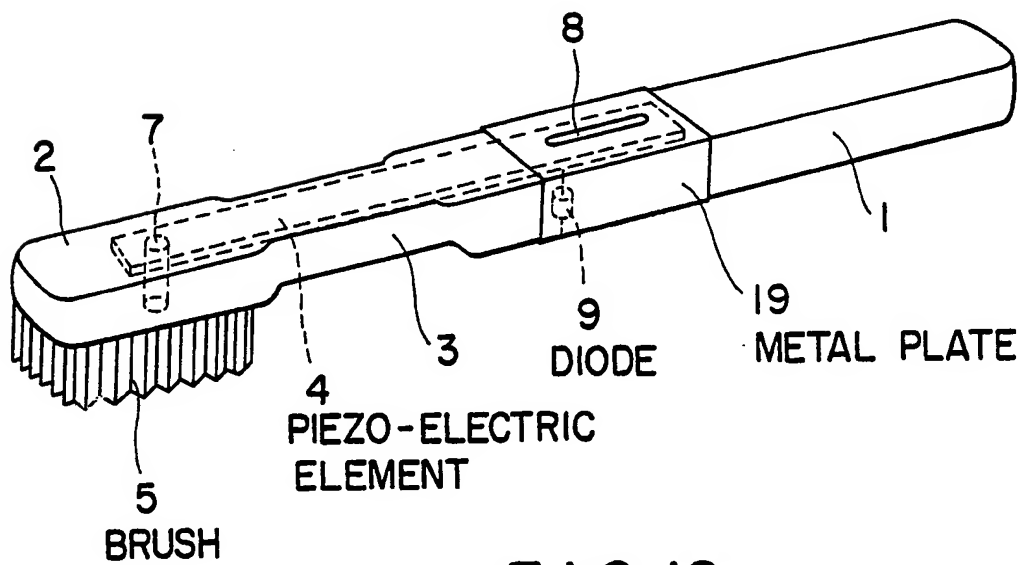


FIG. 10



| DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Category | Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages | Relevant to claim | CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int. Cl.4) |
| A | CH-A- 466 215 (SIMOR) * Claim; figures 1-12 * --- | 1 | A 46 B 15/00 |
| A | FR-A-1 583 683 (CHEMWAY CORP.) * Claim; figure * --- | 1 | |
| A | EP-A-0 199 158 (BAUER) * Page 5, lines 116-130 * ----- | 1 | |
| | | | TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int. Cl.4) |
| | | | A 46 B |
| The present search report has been drawn up for all claims | | | |
| Place of search THE HAGUE | | Date of completion of the search 12-04-1989 | Examiner ERNST R.T. |
| CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS | | | |
| X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document | | T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document | |